

Arthur Davis caught at the straw. He knew that Nancy had gone away on a visit to a friend. He went to her mother's house. Ada Reeves was an invalid; she had not long to live. The young man boldly broached the subject of his visit.

"Mrs. Reeves, you know I love Nancy," he pleaded. "And because we—are said to be cousins—"

"Hey?" demanded the old woman, suspiciously. "Said to be cousins? What do you mean by that, young man?"

"I have been told that Nancy is an adopted daughter," he replied, boldly.

The old woman's face was convulsed with wrath.

"If I knew who said that," she answered, "I'd send her to the penitentiary if it took every penny I have. It's a lie—that's what it is. Nancy is my own child—"

The door opened and Nancy stood there. She had heard every word that was spoken, and her face was as white as death.

"Nancy, he wants to take away your right to have a mother," muttered the old woman angrily.

"Arthur, you must go now," said Nancy decisively. "You won't make it hard, will you?"

"No," he answered, mechanically, and went toward the door. But as he reached the passage he saw Nancy at her side, and in a moment their arms were round each other.

"Oh, Arthur, I love you with all my heart," she murmured. "And I shall never marry. Nor you?"

"Never," he answered, strangling the lump in his throat. And so they parted.

Arthur packed his things that night and went to the station. He meant to leave town forever. Upon a platform he met a neighbor of the Reeves.

"That's a bad thing that happened this afternoon," he said to him.

"What's that?" asked Arthur abstractly.

"That stroke of Mrs. Reeves. I

don't expect she'll live through the night—at least, the doctor thinks there is no chance."

The train came in, but Arthur did not take it. He stood as one stunned. What would Nancy do all alone? His duty was with her in this crisis. Whatever his own suffering, he must fight it down and aid her.

Quickly he made his way up the hill to the house. The front door stood wide open. He walked upstairs, into the old woman's bedroom. She lay unconscious on the bed, and at her side knelt Nancy, praying. Her face was wet with tears.

She seemed to understand the young man's motive in returning, for she looked up in an understanding way and gave him her hand. And upon the other side of the bed Arthur waited through the night.

At dawn the old woman opened her eyes.

"They say she ain't my child," she muttered. "Well, let them say. They won't dare say it openly. If they do I'll send them to the state penitentiary. They laughed at me when I was a girl because I didn't have a child. But they won't dare to laugh now."

The muttering voice died away, but occasionally a word or phrase burst from the old woman's lips. It was evident that she was living in the past again.

"I won't tell Hiram," she muttered later. "He's making good money now. It will change his habits to have the responsibility of a baby of his own. I'll get the girl. Yes, Mrs. Richards, only you must sign a paper never to want to see her again or learn anything about her. A good home? Yes, indeed, and a good father. Hiram drink? Well, yes, he does a little, but no more than most men do, I reckon."

"So I'll sign here, and the child's mine—my very own, to pass as my own daughter—"

"Arthur!" exclaimed Nancy wildly. The secret was revealed, the secret